

# 201hh- Nibbana Is The Ultimate Uncertainty

( Summarised transcription )

Colloquially speaking, if something is determined it implies certainty and undetermined implies uncertainty. The highest undetermined thing is *Nibbana*, the phenomenon of *asankhata dhamma*. So from the point of view of an ignorant *putthujjana*'s mind which depends on certainty, on *nicca*, on permanence, on taking things personally, *Nibbana* is the ultimate uncertainty, the most frightening thing. However, uncertainty is frightening only if you still take certainty for granted and 'put it first' (i.e you see it in the wrong order, rather than seeing that certainty is sought after only because of the basis of uncertainty which is first), you think that things are *nicca* and only occasionally *anicca* without realizing that they are always *anicca*.

Sometimes when people understood the Nibbana that the Buddha taught, they would become distraught, overcome with fear, because for them, that Nibbana meant death or that which would destroy them.

Alagaddūpama Sutta (MN 22):

"Venerable sir, can there be agitation about what is non-existent internally?"

"There can be, bhikkhu," the Blessed One said. "Here, bhikkhu, someone has the view: 'That which is the self is the world; after death I shall be permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change; I shall endure as long as eternity.' He hears the Tathāgata or a disciple of the Tathāgata teaching the Dhamma for the elimination of all standpoints, decisions, obsessions, adherences, and underlying tendencies, for the stilling of all determinations, for the relinquishing of all attachments, for the destruction of craving, for dispassion, for cessation, for Nibbāna. He thinks thus: 'So I shall be annihilated! So I shall perish! So I shall be no more!' Then he sorrows, grieves, and laments, he weeps beating his breast and becomes distraught. That is how there is agitation about what is non-existent internally."

Thus you have to train your mind so that the uncertainty of undetermined Nibbana, the dispassion of Nibbana will be the highest bliss rather than the foremost terror. You can do that by first cultivating virtue and sense restraint, and then if you want a contemplation theme that will approximate Nibbana, you can use the phenomenon of uncertainty. Examples of such contemplations can be found in the suttas:

Udāna Sutta (SN 22:55), and in Āneñja-sappāya Sutta (MN 106): "It might not be, and it might not be mine. It will not be, and it will not be mine. I am giving up what exists, what has come to be."

Maraṇassati Sutta (AN 6:19): "Therefore you should train yourselves: 'We will dwell heedfully. We will develop mindfulness of death acutely for the sake of ending the defilements.' That is how you should train yourselves."

The main characteristic of those contemplations is the recognition of that fundamental context of your existence which is always 'uncertain'. You don't have to fabricate that truth, you just need

to find it and remember it, and that's actually why you can sustain mindfulness on it because it's always true.

### **Uncertainty Is Always In The Background.**

If you want to contemplate the phenomenon of *Nibbana* even as a *puthujjana*, then contemplate uncertainty, as in, start feeling it, contemplate that 'your self is fully caged within Uncertainty' (which is the 'right order of appearance'). The tendency for many people who try to practice *anicca*, is that they try to determine the uncertainty in things 'over there', which means you are then just determining that which is undetermined. So when people go around saying that "everything out there is impermanent", that is true, but that's not the *anicca* which matters. *Anicca* that matters is on the level of your existence, and if you understood it, you wouldn't be able to just say that your body is *anicca* and still be equally as ignorant and passionate as before. If you see that your body, your existence is uncertain, you will feel the threat of that fact. That's why *sila* needs to be established beforehand because most minds would not be able to bear the recognition of what *Nibbana* is. If the mind is strong enough on account of virtue, it will not get distraught in the face of that fundamental uncertain nature.

Everyone can feel that uncertainty, however, for an untrained mind it will feel like anxiety but for the trained mind that got used to it, recognized, and understood uncertainty, such a mind will be at peace, because the anxious aspect of uncertainty is due to ignorance of it.

### **Enduring A Feeling Is Unavoidable**

All you need to do is start practicing sense restraint and that will enable you to 'endure feelings' which is not optional, the only optional thing is HOW you endure it. From the start, your whole life is about trying to get rid of or get hold of feelings, and you do all that based on having to endure those feelings. But if you practice sense restraint and endure it on those terms, you still have to endure it, but the benefit is that it can result in wisdom. That's why the Buddha said:

Salayatana-vibhanga Sutta (Mn 137): " By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation joys, abandon & transcend the six kinds of household joys. Such is their abandoning, such is their transcending. By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation distress, abandon & transcend the six kinds of household distress. Such is their abandoning, such is their transcending. By depending & relying on the six kinds of renunciation equanimity, abandon & transcend the six kinds of household equanimity. Such is their abandoning, such their transcending."

You replace one type of feeling with another because feelings are not optional. Whether it's the feeling of the householder or the renunciant, a feeling will have to be there, you are subjected to it and you will have to endure it. So that's why the WAY of endurance that you choose is important. Will it be the way of welcoming, resisting, denying, or the middle way, the way of not acting out of craving?

## The Undetermined Feeling

When one KNOWS a neutral feeling, it is then recognized as superior to a pleasant feeling, because pleasure pressures you to get more and pain pressures you to get rid of it. But with a neutral feeling, it is undetermined. You are undetermined and not pressured in a neutral feeling. The only problem with a neutral feeling is when you do NOT KNOW it. It's your ignorance of the neutral feeling that then pressures you toward distraction and delusion:

Cūḷa Vedalla Sutta (MN 44): "Pleasant feeling is pleasant when it remains and painful when it perishes. Painful feeling is painful when it remains and pleasant when it perishes. **Neutral feeling is pleasant when known, and painful when not-known**"

If you want to know and benefit from the neutral feeling you have to start restraining the delight in pleasure and stop trying to get rid of the pain by default. When you see the value in the neutral, you will see the value in uncertainty, in neither agreeable-or-disagreeable, the value in non-disturbance, the value in dispassion, in disenchantment, which most people do not see. For most people, passion is seen as good, it provides you with the drive for life, and that's true, that's the householder's joy, but to have that joy you must also be blind to the implicit danger in that thing that you are passionate about, because if you become aware of the danger, then you will realize that it's not worth clinging to or valuing, so then letting go is not a choice. When you realize that your passion is a trap, you automatically don't want it. The only time you get trapped by a trap is when you don't see it as a trap.

So contemplate being within uncertainty not as an object of your attention but as the background of your experience as a whole. Start seeing the characteristics of uncertainty, and if you develop in that way, you will force your mind to become dispassionate, and that's when the mind starts seeing clearly when the clouds of passion disappear.

## The Context Of The Uncertain Body

*Sabbe Sankhara Anicca*- all determinations are uncertain. If determinations are uncertain then what is to be said about the things that the determinations determine. They are even more uncertain. So, *sabbe SANKHARA anicca*, *sabbe SANKHARA dukkha*, all determinations are uncertain and unsatisfactory, thus *sabbe DHAMMA anatta* - everything that is determined cannot be owned.

Practically speaking, determinations (*sankhara*) are things that are the basis for your ownership. For example, let's say you are attached to your house and family, the joy that you get on account of those things is determined by having the house and family. You can then say, if you are attached to your family, the presence of both yours and their bodies are now the basis for the entire emotional relationship that you have with your family, all the joys and griefs. Those emotional experiences would not be there if the body was not there, so the fundamental determination is the body. That's why if one maintains the context of the body as the necessary

basis for any experience in your life, with the recognition of Uncertainty of that determination/ that context, then whatever you experience based on that uncertain, unstable bodily context, is unownable. So your family will still be there and perceived but now the emotional basis for your ownership is gone because it's seen based on uncertainty.

It takes a lot of training to develop that level of clarity regarding the context of the body as a determination for everything. Most people wouldn't see that connection, they wouldn't see that the presently enduring body is that which determines all of their emotional joys and griefs that they get from some event in the world. If a person sees that the main characteristic of their body is uncertainty then it doesn't matter what comes their way, they wouldn't get emotionally upset because they cannot forget the container of uncertainty in which this is all happening. A great example of this is found in:

Nandamātar Sutta (AN 7:50): “I don’t have only that amazing & astounding quality, venerable sir. I have another amazing & astounding quality. I had an only son: Nanda, dear & appealing. The rulers seized & abducted him on some pretext and had him executed. But when the boy had been arrested or was being arrested, when he had been imprisoned or was being imprisoned, when he had been killed or was being killed, I don’t recall any alteration of my mind.”

“It’s amazing, Nandamātar! It’s astounding, that you can purify even as little as the arising of a thought.”

The mind that is established upon the undetermined, upon the uncertain as the fundamental non-negotiable basis, the *Nibbana*, will not resist the uncertainty because doing so is still within the uncertainty.

Your sense of self needs to have these determinations that you blindly take ownership of. The point to consider here, it's not about throwing away your possessions, but instead find things that you do own and through that sense of ownership start discerning the uncertainty of that thing. Initially, that will be felt anxiously, but once the mind is developed you will not suffer much on account of that anxiety, however, it's still the same route that you have to go down if you want to develop Nibbana.

### **The One And Only Path**

Vitthara Sutta(An.4.162): “Monks, there are these four modes of practice. Which four? Painful practice with slow understanding, painful practice with quick understanding, pleasant practice with slow understanding, & pleasant practice with quick understanding..”

Either way, it's the same path that needs to be walked, through the sense of ownership which is present you need to discern the uncertainty, and the mind which has developed *samadhi* will not be moved by that uncertainty, relatively speaking. *Samadhi* is not measured by how peaceful or blissful your meditation session was until the bell rang, it's measured by how much you don't move in the face of uncertainty, sensuality, pain, misfortune, etc. How much is your mind scraping at the walls to outrun the pain, or how much is it like a mountain that cannot be

moved? Being immovable is *samadhi*. The beginning of the right *samadhi* is not being moved by the five hindrances or by the joys and griefs regarding the world. If you develop that, it's the *samadhi* of *jhana*.

Most people hope that if they do some technique of watching the breath and so on, they will get into *jhana* and then they will not be bothered by the hindrances or moved by the joys and griefs of the world, but as you can see, you have to do the work of not moving on account of the joys, griefs, and hindrances first and then the result will be the pleasure of the seclusion, which is where *jhana* is. The measure of *samadhi* is the immovability regarding any pressure whether positive or negative, but it's usually negative.

If you have no *sila*, you have no *samadhi* and will be completely overwhelmed if you understand what *Nibbana* is. The Buddha's teaching will terrify you, because from the *putthajjanas* point of view, "it is the death of me" and it is. If you invest the effort in *sila*, through such endurance you will be developing *samadhi*.

The necessary *samadhi* will be born from the work of your *sila*, sense restraint, abandoning the joys and griefs, and your cultivation of the context of uncertainty. In that way, you will force your mind to compose, which will have to result in clear seeing.